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FM AMEMBASSY RABAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6519
INFO RUEHAS/AMEMBASSY ALGIERS IMMEDIATE 4421
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON IMMEDIATE 3301
RUEHNK/AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT IMMEDIATE 3490
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS IMMEDIATE 4629
RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS IMMEDIATE 9292
RUEHCL/AMCONSUL CASABLANCA IMMEDIATE 3034

C O N F I D E N T I A L RABAT 000858

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STATE FOR NEA/MAG, DRL/NESCA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/10/2011
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PBTS](#) [MO](#)
SUBJECT: SAHRAWI AND BERBER (AMAZIGH) STUDENTS
FIGHTING INAGADIR

Classified By: Political Counselor Craig Karp, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: Sahrawi students have been demonstrating at several Moroccan universities, beginning May 3, calling for independence for the Western Sahara. Multiple sources confirm that the demonstrations, inspired by the UNSCR call for negotiations on Sahara, led to violent clashes with Moroccan students and arrests, and continued for at least several days. In Agadir and Casablanca, Sahrawi students were confronted by Berber students. Moroccan sources indicated that the authorities did not intervene until the two groups -- the Sahrawis and the Berbers -- became violent towards one another. In Marrakech, Sahrawi students demonstrated to support the Agadir Sahrawis. In all cases demonstrators showed the POLISARIO (SADR) flag, which invariably triggered official and unofficial response. A pro-Moroccan non-governmental organization (NGO) told us that the demonstrators were only a minority of Sahrawi students. Human rights groups maintain that the counter-demonstrations were engineered by authorities. Sahrawi students at Moroccan universities have long been a font of separatist activism, subject to less immediate constraints than demonstrators in the Sahara. End Summary.

12. (C) On May 3, Sahrawi students attending the University of Ibn Zhor in Agadir, located in southern Morocco, began demonstrating within the university. On May 11, the Sahrawi students planned to commemorate the founding of the POLISARIO at the university. The Sahrawi students carried POLISARIO/SADR (Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic) flags and banners, which supported the independence of the Western Sahara from Morocco. Berber (Amazigh) students demonstrated in opposition to the Sahrawi students and denounced the Sahrawis as separatists on their banners.

13. (C) According to an Agadir source, the police did not intervene in the demonstrations on campus. When the students moved the demonstrations to the areas surrounding the university and drew knives to fight one another and the Sahrawi students threw "Molotov cocktails," the police stopped what sources identified as rioting. The confrontation between the two groups continued throughout the week. On Thursday, May 10, students and members of the university administration held a sit-in denouncing the violence and supported an atmosphere of tolerance from different view points on the campus. To show support for the Ibn Zhor Sahrawi students, Sahrawis at the University of Kadi 'Ayad in Marrakech demonstrated on May 10; sources indicated

that no Berber students were involved and that the Sahrawis threw stones at the police. Reportedly, Sahrawi female students left Casablanca because of the lack of security.

¶4. (C) The Sahrawi Association for Victims of Grave Human Rights Abuses Committed by the Moroccan State (SAVHR) published a communique on May 10 saying that "tens" of students were wounded. There is no confirmation of the number of students involved; sources only indicated that "many" were involved in the Ibn Zhor demonstrations. According to SAVHR, five Sahrawi students were arrested at Ibn Zhor and more than sixteen were arrested at Kadi 'Ayad. The communique says that the Sahrawi students are victims of "racist attacks" and that the Moroccan authorities used excessive force.

¶5. (C) Poloff met with several Berber political figures on May 11 (septel) who identified the recent problems between the university students as an "old" problem. These Berber political activists said that the problem is that the Sahrawis identify themselves as Arabs and believe that they have the right to land which is originally Berber. (Note: The Sahrawi are part of the Arab Hassaniya tribal confederation. End Note.) The Berbers claim that the student problems stem from the fact that the Sahrawi-Arabs support the SADR and totally denigrate the Sahrawi-Berber. Under no circumstances, according to the Berber activists, should the territory of the Western Sahara be separated from the rest of Morocco because all of Morocco is Berber. The activists were in total support of the Berber students in Agadir and dismissed the Marrakech students as irrelevant.

¶6. (C) Comment: These have been more significant outbreaks than anything we have heard about taking place in the Western Sahara itself. Moroccan universities have traditionally been

hotbeds of Saharan activism; the POLISARIO itself sprang from such roots. There are no universities in the Sahara (a frequently heard complaint but not especially justified given the limited student population there). The Government of Morocco provides education to many eligible graduates, along with stipends, including for travel. These stipends, not available to students from Morocco proper, are alleged by some to be a source of tension among student populations. Many younger, university-aged Sahrawis argue for independence of the territory, whereas there are others that see greater opportunity in Morocco. It is interesting that the young Berbers are affronted by the separatists' ideology, and not inspired by them to separatism of their own, as has sometimes been feared by the authorities. End Comment.

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